

Child and Family Assessment Practice Guidance

Introduction:

The guidance aims to assist social workers and their managers to undertake a Child and Family Assessment. The timeline for undertaking an assessment incorporates the recommendations of Working Together 2018 which states:

“Decision points and review points involving the child and family and relevant professionals should be used to keep the assessment on track. This is to ensure that help is given in a timely and appropriate way and that the impact of this help is analysed and evaluated in terms of the improved outcomes and welfare of the child”

The Child and Family Assessment Guidance promotes high quality effective assessments, leading to purposeful plans and interventions, which are developed through meaningful relationships with children, their families and those involved with them.

A good assessment investigates the three domains of the Triangle. The interaction of these domains requires careful investigation during the assessment. The aim is to reach a judgement about the nature and level of needs and/or risks that the child may be facing within their family.

The assessment will be used for initial care planning for all children, including children with a disability or SEND, children who become looked after, are subject to child in need planning (Section 17), child protection (Section 47) outcomes and concerns to an Initial Child Protection Conference.

it will be updated to review the risks to a child through the Review Child Protection Case Conference pathway as well as reassessing the needs of children in need or looked after children at points of change in their lives, such as preparing for reunification.

Assessments of children's needs should be a continuous process with at least an annual updated Child and Family Assessment undertaken. A new Child and Family Assessment should also be undertaken when there is a critical incident or significant change to the child and family's circumstances.

The guidance aims to assist social workers and their managers to undertake a Children and Family Assessment.

Key Children Act 1989 principles for assessments:

- a. The welfare and safety of the child is paramount
- b. Families are unique and know their own story
- c. Children are best maintained within their own family unit wherever this is safe to do so
- d. There is a duty to assist families to identify support either within their own family or the community in order to meet their child's needs and keep them safe
- e. When working with family's social workers will be clear about what we are doing and why, and the legislative framework for practice

- f. Consent for an assessment will always be sought, even where there are concerns about significant harm, unless to do so will put any person at immediate risk of harm
- g. Children and family members will be treated with respect, openness, and honesty; staff will talk to them, listen carefully and record and take into account their views
- h. Assessments will be undertaken in a timely manner
- i. The assessment will balance risk and resilience factors
- j. The child will remain central to the focus of the assessment, whilst involving immediate family members and any other significant people in family or community
- k. The assessment will lead to an agreed plan of intervention incorporating the wishes and feelings of the child, their family and professional agencies involved
- l. Each plan will be outcome focused and intervention will not wait until assessment and plans are completed if a need is identified that requires action
- m. In addition, the Assessment Framework Triangle in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 provides a model which should be used to examine how the different aspects of the child's life and context interact and impact on the child. It notes that it is important that:
 - Information is gathered and recorded systematically.
 - Information is checked and discussed with the child and their parents/carers where appropriate.
 - Differences in views about information are recorded; and
 - The impact of what is happening to the child is clearly identified.

The Children and Families Act 2014 as set out in [Support and Aspiration: A New Approach to Special Educational Needs And Disability: Progress And Next Steps](#) states:

- From birth to 25 children, young people and their parents are given greater control and choice in decision-making
- It is a requirement from birth- to-25 to commence Education, Health and Care Plans
- Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments should be combined with other social care assessments where appropriate. As far as possible, there should be a 'tell us once' approach to sharing information during the assessment and planning process so that families and young people do not have to repeat the same information to different agencies, or different practitioners and services within each agency.
- It must be discussed with the child/young person/parents what information they are happy for the Local Authority to share with other agencies.
- A record should be made of what information can be shared and with whom. Where services are assessed as being needed, their provision should be delivered and should not be delayed until the Education, Health and Care Plan is complete.
- Following the completion of an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment, if the Local Authority decides that an Education, Health and Care Plan is not necessary, it must notify the child/young person/parent, the education and the health service and give the reasons for its decision.

- This notification must take place as soon as practicable and at the latest within 16 weeks of the initial request or of the child or young person having otherwise been brought to the Local Authority attention.
- The Local Authority must also inform the child/young person/parent of their right to appeal that decision and the time limit for doing so, of the requirement for them to consider mediation should they wish to appeal, and the availability of information, advice and support and disagreement resolution services.

New Requests for Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments for 19- to 25-year-olds

- Young people who do not already have an Education, Health and Care Plan continue to have the right to request an assessment of their SEN at any point prior to their 25th birthday (unless an assessment has been carried out in the previous six months).
- Where such a request is made, or the young person is otherwise brought to the attention of the Local Authority as being someone who may have SEN, the Local Authority must follow the guidance set put above for carrying out Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments. In addition, when making decisions about whether a plan needs to be made for a 19- to 25-year-old, Local Authorities must consider whether the young person requires additional time, in comparison to the majority of others of the same age who do not have SEN, to complete his or her education or training.

Focus on Child or Young Person – Voice of the Child and their lived experience

It is essential that each child's needs are identified and addressed separately within the assessment. Focussing simply on one child could lead to the needs of siblings being overlooked and not met, particularly in large families.

Children should be seen and listened to and included throughout the assessment process. The 'child's voice' should be evidenced throughout the assessment and ongoing case recording. Their ways of communicating should be understood in the context of their family and community as well as their behaviour and developmental stage.

Any services provided should be based on a clear analysis of the child's needs, and the changes that are required to improve outcomes for them. Their continued appropriateness/suitability should be kept under review.

Children should be actively involved in all parts of the process based upon their age, developmental stage and identity. Direct work with the child and family should include observations of the interactions between the child and the parents/care givers.

All agencies involved with the child, the parents and the wider family have a duty to collaborate and share information to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child.

We want to ensure that Children and Families and their experience within any service area are meaningful and focus on ensuring safety and achieves change.

Right from the beginning, we want to keep the child at the center. The assessment needs to be:

1. Mindful of the child's journey through our system.
2. Life story work should begin right from the start of our involvement by being honest with children about why we are involved and including them right from the beginning.

3. All assessments must remain focused on safeguarding even if referred concern is in relation to housing or no recourse to public funds.
4. The social worker/ practitioner should carefully plan the following:
 - See/interview the child, usually alone to understand their experiences and any concerns, and also with their parents to assess their relationship
 - Interview the parents and any other relevant family members
 - Determine what the parents should be told of any concerns
 - Consult with and consider contributions from all relevant agencies, including agencies covering previous addresses in the UK and abroad.

Planning

All assessments should be planned and coordinated by a social worker and the purpose of the assessments should be transparent, understood and agreed by all participants. There should be an agreed statement setting out the aims of the assessments process.

Planning should identify the different elements of the assessments including who should be involved. It is good practice to hold a planning meeting to clarify roles and timescales as well as services to be provided during the assessments where there are a number of family members and agencies likely to play a part in the process.

The assessments process can be summarised as follows:

- Gathering relevant information
- Analysing the information and reaching professional judgments
- Making decisions and planning interventions
- Intervening, service delivery and/or further assessment
- Evaluating and reviewing progress

Assessments should be a dynamic process, which analyses and responds to the changing nature and level of need and/or risk faced by the child. A good assessment will monitor and record the impact of any services delivered to the child and family and review the help being delivered. Whilst services may be delivered to a parent or carer, the Assessment should be focused on the needs of the child and on the impact any services are having on the child.

In order to improve the quality and management oversight of our Child and Family Assessments, we have put together some guidance and bottom lines to support Social Workers in the completion of these:

1. **Within 24 hours (1 working day)** when a child is passed through to Assessment and Intervention from the MASH, the Duty Practice Manager will review the referral information and provide a management oversight case note of:
 - What the concerns are and analysis of risk
 - What a social worker needs to do and by when with a clear rationale as to what needs to happen which is shared with the child and family when appropriate. This should include a visit to the child that is proportionate to the presenting risks as soon as possible
 - Safety planning should be completed with the child and all relevant adults

- The manager should give an indication on the complexity of the case as to how long the assessment would need, for example 15-35 working days. This expectation will be reviewed in accordance to the child's needs as the social work assessment progresses.
2. Social workers will arrange a visit with the family within at least 5 working days, however the urgency of the visit will depend on the presenting factors and the risk to the child. The social worker will familiarize themselves with the history and will update the chronology.
 3. The Practice Manager will also check that the visit to the child has been recorded on Mosaic **(all visits to children under section 17 to be recorded within three working days and 24 hours (1 working day) if s.47).**
 4. **By working day 10**, the Practice Manager and Social worker will formally discuss the situation for the child and record it as management oversight or case supervision if this has been pre-arranged. This will be recorded immediately on Mosaic. This needs to include the social worker's analysis from the visit completed to the child and family, the views of the professional network, a hypothesis from the social worker and manager about what might be going on and to update the assessment plan with clear timescales. The social worker is expected to have a basic understanding of the family history and will have reviewed Mosaic for family history and update the child and family chronology.
 5. At this point, there will be a **decision** about if this assessment will need **to go beyond 20 working days** and a rationale for this based on the child's needs and further intervention that might be needed. If the assessment is to close by working day 20, a specific date that this needs to be with the Practice Manager for authorization needs to be recorded.
 6. **By 25 working days** (for assessments going beyond 20 working days) there should be a formal and reflective supervision record on the child's file consolidating our intervention with the family up to that point, with reference to what the specific Level Four (CON) concerns are and what has already been provided to support the family, what is working well, what current safeguarding concerns still exist; the appropriate level of intervention for the child to be effectively safeguarded and what the ongoing plan needs to look like for the child. This should make explicit reference to if there needs to be an Early Help Plan, an ongoing Child in Need Plan or escalation to Child Protection Procedures. A date for when the social worker will submit the assessment to the Practice Manager needs to be recorded. The Practice Manager will also need to ensure that all the visits to the child are recorded. If the assessment requires more time than initially recommended, there needs to be clarity about why this is and when it will be completed by.
 7. Should the practice manager and the social worker agree that a child will benefit from support under the child in need remit, then the assessment should be completed and a progress to a child in need plan.
 8. **Within 35 working days (7 weeks from the point of allocation)**, the majority of the Child and Family Assessment should be completed and authorized by a Practice Manager. The Practice Manager's authorization comment should be recorded as a case note within Management oversight. There also needs to be oversight around if the safety plan has been shared with relevant professionals, family members. The manager will also ensure that the chronology is up to date prior to signing down the assessment.
 9. However, if there is a presenting need for the assessment to continue for a further period of time up to 44 working days, then this needs to be clearly documented with the reasons why.
 10. **By working day 45 the assessment** should be completed and be signed off. However, if there is a reason why the assessment is over the time frame, then this needs a further management oversight to justify the delay and why the assessment is out of date. A clear updated time scale should be added to explain the expectation of progress.
 11. Outside of the above checkpoints, management oversight is also needed when there is a

- change in the plan for children or critical decision-making points. This includes recommendations for Child Protection Conferences, Legal Gateway Meetings or escalation to Group Manager requesting that Legal Proceedings are required.
12. Where a decision is made that the identified needs for the child could be best met through a child in need plan, then the Child in Need workflow will commence.
 13. When discussing the focus of a maximum of 44 working day assessment with Practice Manager, consider what tools might be useful to explore the risk posed to children i.e. Neglect toolkit, Drug and Alcohol use questionnaires, DASH risk assessment.
 14. Before a child and family assessment is submitted to a Practice Manager for outcoming it needs to contain the following:
 - Full updated chronology containing significant events relating to the child(ren) throughout their lifetime that impacts upon a child's safety and welfare, circumstances or home environment
 - The assessment should include an analysis of how the history impacts both on the present situation and the ability of the parents to meet the child's needs now and in the future
 - Reason for referral paragraph summarising the key events which immediately led to this assessment
 - The child's voice and an analysis of their needs. The referral should be discussed with the child and any worries should be recorded. In the child's own words what is the impact of the worries on their day to day lived experience
 - The safety plan must be clear what steps the adults will take to avoid any harmful behaviour happening and be specific exactly who is to do what, where and when. The child and parents must have a copy of their safety plan. Safety plans must be sent to all of the professional network, so they are aware of their role in ensuring the child remains safe. The school must be provided with a copy for all school age children. Every case should have a what if safety plan unless management oversight says otherwise
 - Assessment of all parents / carers and adults living in the home or visiting regularly. There should be clear evidence of all attempts made to contact and involve any parents who do not live with the child and very clear rationale given if this is not done for safety reasons. All adults in the home should be identified and their role in the child's life considered
 - All agencies involved with the child and adult must be spoken to and their feedback recorded in detail. This should include drug and alcohol, mental health services for adults and probation as necessary. Do not record 'no concerns'. Record when they last saw the child/ adult and their professional opinion of the current situation of the child or adult
 - Analysis should be a formulation of the information gathered in the assessment which balances mitigating factors (safety) against risk (worries) and in doing so reaches a professional judgement and prognosis of the likelihood of future harm. This needs to take into account the history as identified in the chronology, the voice of the child and the views of other professionals. The analysis should inform the recommendations of the Child and Family Assessment.

Where a child is involved in other assessment processes, it is important that these are coordinated so that the child does not become lost between the different agencies involved and their different procedures. All plans for the child developed by the various agencies and individual professionals should be joined up so that the child and family experience a single Child and Family Assessment and planning process, which

shares a focus on the outcomes for the child.

The social worker should analyse all the information gathered from the enquiry stage of the assessment to decide the nature and level of the child's needs and the level of risk, if any, they may be facing. The line manager should provide regular supervision and challenge the social worker's assumptions as part of this process. An informed decision should be taken on the nature of any action required and which services should be provided, mindful of the need to understand the level of need and risk in a family from the child's perspective and ensure action or commission services which will have maximum positive impact on the child's life.

When new information comes to light or circumstances change the child's needs, any previous conclusions should be updated and critically reviewed to ensure that the child is not overlooked.

- Upon concluding the assessment, the Social Worker will propose a course of future action and which should involve a plan of work under Section 17, S47, no further action with advice given and "step down" to Early Help services for single or multi-agency coordination. This requires a management decision and rationale.

See also:

- Management oversight checklist
- Allocations checklist
- CFA flow process

Review / Contacts / References	
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